

Date: March 14 , 2018

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: Lauren Anderson, Chair, Connecticut College Education Department and Secretary, American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education Connecticut Chapter (AACTE-CT)

As a teacher educator and researcher, Chair of the Education Department at Connecticut College, and member of AACTE-CT's Executive Committee, I write to share my concerns, and those of colleagues, regarding *Bill No. 455, An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. Without question, we applaud and share the Education Committee's, Minority Teacher Recruitment Taskforce's, Black and Puerto Rican Caucus's, and others' sense of urgency about the need to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color in Connecticut's schools. However, for reasons elaborated below, we urge you not to support Bill No. 455.

Attracting teachers of color into the profession *is* crucial. So too is ensuring that they bring and/or receive the *best* preparation available, and enter in ways that do not undermine the profession they are joining or their standing within it. Bill No. 455 works against this. It loosens and lowers the bar for some teachers' preparation, and in doing so, threatens to establish "separate and unequal" tracks of teachers.

While the desire to deploy "innovative" recruitment strategies and "eliminate obstacles to certification" is understandable, the bill's vague language leaves room for wide-ranging interpretations and risks exacerbating, rather than ameliorating, inequities for teacher candidates and teachers of color and for students in hard-to-staff schools. Section 2's "provisions for the acceptance of *equivalent* education, experience or other circumstances" as a "substitute for testing, coursework or degree requirements" and Section 6's acceptance of "a satisfactory score on a *relevant* example or completed advanced coursework in a *relevant* subject area" in lieu of a "subject area major" are similarly worrisome (my *emphases*). Such provisions increase the likelihood that students in districts like Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven will receive teachers who have not met the same standards to which those in districts like Westport, Avon, and West Hartford are held. They also put minority teachers at risk of participating in credentialing processes and programs that mark them adversely in the labor market. This alongside TEAM's defunding is a kind of perfect storm, placing the state's most vulnerable youth in the path of the least prepared, and now less structurally supported, new educators.

Sections 3 and 4 deepen our concerns about a two-tiered profession. They relax certification requirements for those with "three years of successful teaching" under charter school educator permits, which grant access to classroom teaching based on a test score (i.e., Praxis II). This allows charter school instructors--those with the most limited (sometimes nonexistent) preparation, often working in schools predominantly populated by other new, underprepared, and under-certified teachers—to bypass initial certification. In other words, they will be able to skip entirely the licensing level that my undergraduates—like Andrea Luna, Steve Cofrancesco,

Rocio Tinoco, all first, second and third year teachers in New London; two among them teachers of color—worked towards via a multi-year program, with embedded clinical experiences, and a capstone student teaching semester. In Sections 3 and 4, too, vague language—for example, granting provisional licenses contingent upon demonstrating “*commitment* to continued education and professional development” and “evidence of *effectiveness*” (my *emphases*)—begs important questions: demonstrating commitment how? effectiveness according to what?

It is notable that Section 5’s reference to a forthcoming “educator effectiveness” definition mentions soliciting input from the “Performance Evaluation and Advisory Council... superintendents, community leaders, industry leaders, parents and representatives from interdistrict magnet school programs and charter schools,” and not higher education partners.

In light of this, I close by stating that we in higher education are willing partners with relevant expertise, and not the “choke points” we have sometimes been labeled. To that end, we would hope that higher education representation, including from AACTE-CT, would be involved in the definitional work and incorporated moreso into a taskforce like the one proposed in Section 7.

We know from research that teachers who experience high quality teacher preparation stay longer. We know that school conditions and induction supports are essential levers for retention. We know the difference between real, robust grow-your-own programs and the shallow offerings of those seeking to privatize public education. AACTE-CT members are working in innovative ways to tackle these issues—for example, pairing teacher candidates of color with mentors of color at UCONN, creating structures for employees and students at partner schools to enroll for free in Quinnipiac teacher education courses, securing external funding at the University of Hartford for programmatic scholarships to address access and timely degree completion for members of underrepresented populations, establishing a stronger pipeline through early college experiences at many of our campuses and so on.

We also know that state data indicate an excess of teachers of color holding Connecticut credentials but not employed; this raises broader concerns—for example, hiring biases and a popular discourse, reform climate, and salary structure that makes teaching a profession that isn’t just hard-to-*staff*, but hard-to-*choose*. Bill No. 455 does little to address these concerns and may in fact worsen them.

We are committed—in collaboration with one another and our K-12 partners—to doing what we can to ensure a professional continuum that honors teachers of color with the highest quality preparation, support, development, school conditions, compensation, and avenues for advancement. With support, we are willing to do more. But doing more is only made harder when standards rise for our programs and candidates while relaxing for alternate providers.